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ABSTRACT

The principal's role in educating reading teachers exceeds the scheduling of an occasional inservice activity with the area reading coordinator. The principal's role must include the following: (1) becoming familiar with the area of reading; (2) committing time and effort to the program through staff development and through participation in exemplary language learning activities in the school; (3) evaluating the teacher's theoretical orientation to reading as well as the effectiveness of that teacher; and (4) promoting awareness of the reading program within the community. If the reading program of the elementary school is to be a reflection of what is known about language and language learning, the principal must be more than a facilitator. The principal must take an active role in the reading program, in the teachers' theoretical growth, and in parent communication. To do any less leaves the school without a central catalyst in the growth of literacy. (HOD)

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More Than Facilitator:

A Principal's Job in Educating New and Experienced Reading Teachers

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Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, Houston, March, 1985.

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More Than Facilitator:

A Principal's Job in Educating New and

Experienced Reading Teachers

[Insert Figure 1 here]

By encouraging teachers in the school to help children use language for purposeful and important means, such as inviting a school administrator to a picnic, the principal of this first grader's school has just exemplified the notions that language learning is natural (Goodman & Goodman, 1979), that children have semantic intent in their language use (Moss, 1985b; Milz, 1983; Harste, Burke & Woodward, 1981), and that teachers, more than tests, have the capacity to guide children in their language learning (Shuy, 1981).

The principal's role in educating reading teachers exceeds the scheduling of an occasional inservice activity with the area reading coordinator. The principal's role must also include 1) becoming familiar with the area of reading; 2) committing time and effort to program planning, implementation, and evaluation; 3) encouraging the faculty through staff development and through participation in exemplary language learning activities in the school; 4) evaluating the teacher's theoretical orientation to reading as well as the effectiveness of that teacher; and 5) promoting awareness of the reading program within the community.

Knowledge of Reading

When questioning a principal about the reading program in the elementary school, one should hear more than the title of the basal

reading series the school district adopted. A principal's knowledge of and positive attitude for reading are consistently addressed as important attributes in the development of an exemplary reading program in the elementary school (Oklahoma State Department of Education, 1982; DeGuire, 1981; Manning & Manning, 1981; Kean, 1979; Sherwood, 1977; Melvin, 1975).

Studies seem to indicate that many principals are knowledgeable about reading (Panchyshyn, 1971; Aldridge, 1973; Gehring, 1977). When a principal has a background in reading, he or she can bring that experience to the planning, development, and implementation of the reading program. Knowledge of reading is prerequisite to building professional development goals and for evaluating a faculty member in reading. Community awareness and public relations for the reading program can only be promoted when the principal has more than a surface knowledge of reading and language learning.

Reading Program Development

Although principals may be knowledgeable about reading, they may lack leadership skills to help in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the reading program. Wurtz (1975) reported that teachers must often seek advice from other sources because principals are seldom involved with the reading program. Coordinating and evaluating the reading program is often the job of a specially trained reading teacher or teachers, rather than the principal (Binski, 1975).

Because the effectiveness of the reading program may largely depend upon the principal's leadership capabilities (Cox, 1978), inservice training is necessary for principals in the area of reading. Knowledge is needed by elementary principals in the fundamentals of

not only the reading process and language learning by elementary children but also the implementation of a language-based program in reading. A commitment is needed within the central office of the district and within educational administration departments of teacher training institutes to prepare elementary principals who can articulate the goals of a language-based reading program and who can develop, implement, and evaluate those goals in a reading program.

Staff Development

Principals, in conjunction with central office staff, are often responsible for staff development in reading as well as other program areas. Whereas staff development has traditionally been monthly inservice training sessions, an expanded and creative model of both direct and indirect staff development needs to be pursued within the school.

One such approach to the direct involvement of the staff in development activities may include a reading/language team approach with a reading consultant, parent, lead teachers composing the team whose task is to explore the reading process and the school reading program. This team may then disseminate the information to other teachers and parents. A second direct approach to staff development should involve encouragement for teachers to become active members in professional organizations whose main function is teacher development in reading and language, such as N.C.T.E. and I.R.A. With P.T.A. funds to help provide substitute teachers during conferences and to help defray institutional membership costs, teachers can be provided recent research and practices in the reading and language. This information must also be disseminated by lead teachers to other

teachers. Indirect approaches to staff development in reading and language are possibly even more effective means of encouraging teachers to use language for purposeful and important reasons. In one North Carolina elementary school, week-long minicourses on everything from cooking to computers. As such, children select topics which are of interest to them, and children use language as a means to learn about their world. In a second elementary in North Carolina, teachers are encouraged to highlight student authors through P.T.A.-sponsored essay contests, bulletin boards with student-written products on display, presentation of student-authored books to other students within the school (see Figure 2).

[Insert Figure 2]

A third indirect approach in the elementary school which can be used to encourage the use of language involves the use of a school-wide penpal program (Moss, 1985a). In this program, children write letters to people with various functions throughout the school such as the principal, teachers, aides, parent volunteers, or P.T.A. officers. Children can also write to other children such as cafeteria helpers, safety patrol team members, or computer club members. In this way children are writing for real purposes: to thank, congratulate, or inquire about the work people are doing in the school.

[Insert Figure 3]

As a final idea for an indirect approach to staff development, the principal in one elementary school initiated an incentive program for reading books in or out of school. After reading an established number of books, children received a ticket good for admittance to the local skating rink. In each of these school-wide activities, the

principal acts as a catalyst to initiate purposeful language use; teachers are urged to continue this meaning-centered approach in their classrooms.

Teacher Supervision

In a meaning-centered school, a principal knowledgeable in reading can expand the role of supervision to include observation of teacher instructional behaviors to ascertain the theoretical orientation of the reading teacher (Harste & Burke, 1976; DeFord, 1978). Through an observation system designed to identify the instructional behaviors of a reading teacher (Moss, 1981; Richards & Levitov, 1985), the principal can identify and monitor the theoretical growth of a reading teacher, evaluate possible outcomes of the staff development program, and observe teacher instruction as a reflection of the goals of the reading program. In addition, the principal's observations of teachers can identify those best suited for student teacher placement. Within a program with an expanded view of teacher supervision in reading, lead teachers or the principal could observe and code teacher behaviors and identify teachers with whom additional language-based inservice in reading or language could be valuable.

Parent and Community Involvement

The principal has an important role as the public relations agent for the reading program of the school. Through the communication of the goals of the reading program, the principal can begin to solicit help and support from parents.

The principal must encourage teachers to allow parents to see student language products that are meaning-centered from students in every grade. Primary grade children can write daily news stories from

their own experiences. These news stories can be displayed through the month and collected, bound and sent home at the end of the month.

[Insert Figure 4]

Through communication of the goals of a meaning-centered program, parents will be able to watch the language-learning of their children, rather than be concerned that every product is not sent home with every written convention corrected on the children's paper.

The principal must communicate the process of language learning to the parents of the community (Laffey, 1980). This can be accomplished through monthly parents' meetings. In one North Carolina elementary school, parent meetings are held within the school as well as at more convenient locations within the community for those parents who may not have transportation to attend school meetings. A second communication method used by an elementary school can be the monthly newsletter. This newsletter can suggest language ideas for the home as well as the goals of the reading program and reading highlights of different classes.

[Insert Figure 5]

As well as the process of language learning, the principal must encourage parents to rejoice in the product as a result of learning language. Teachers should be encouraged to invite parents to the

[Insert Figure 6]

school to celebrate the language and reading program. While the program may, in fact, be focused on another curricular or extra-curricular activity, the language of children is also to be celebrated through child-written oral presentations and child-written invitations and programs.

[Insert Figure 7]

Conclusion

If the reading program of the school is to be a reflection of what we know about language and language learning, the principal must be more than a facilitator. The principal must take an active role in the reading program, teachers' theoretical growth, and parent communication. To do any less is to leave your school without a central catalyst in the exciting growth of literacy.

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Figure 1

Invitation to picnic (Ben, kindergarten)

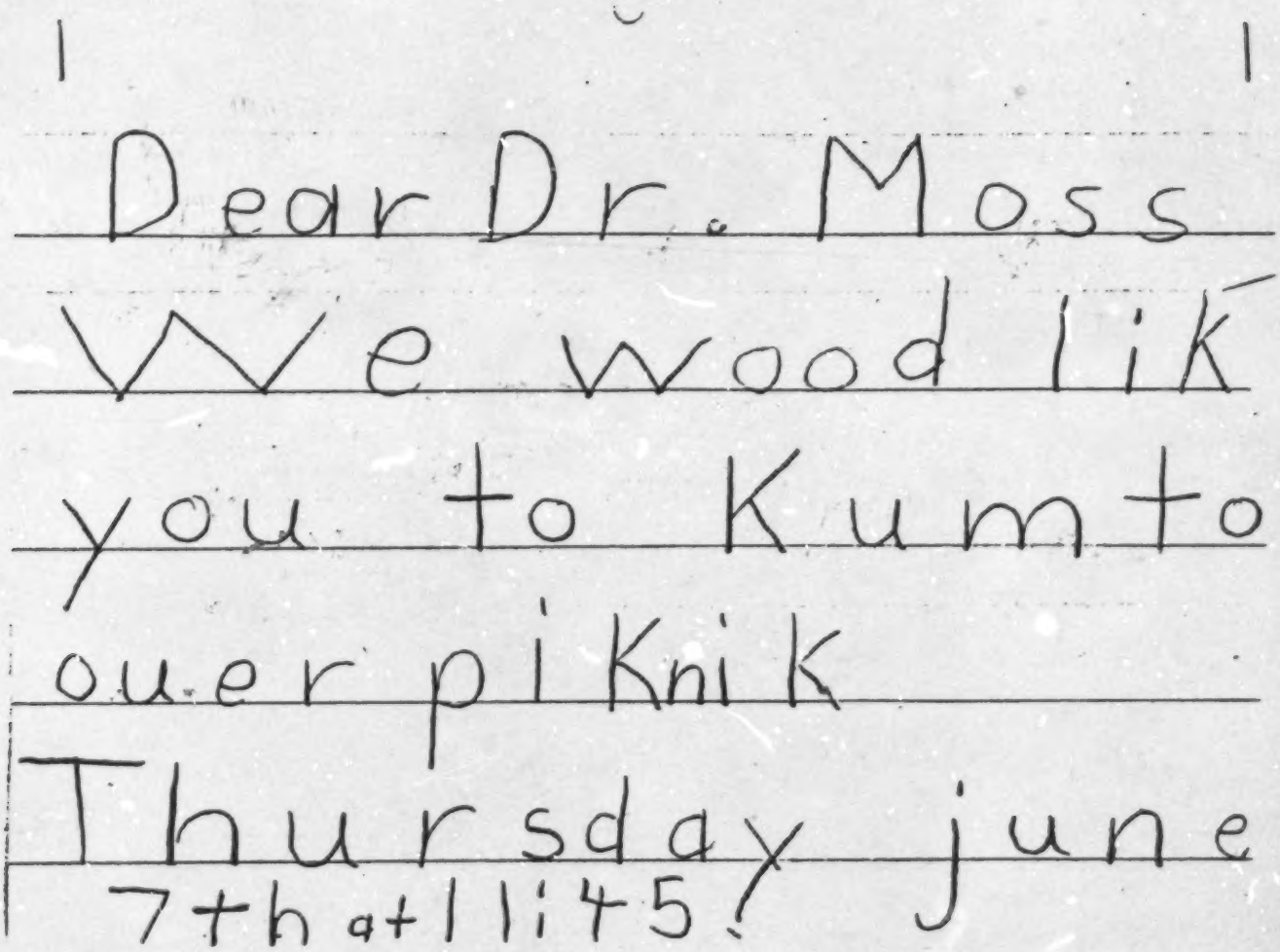

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Figure 2

Invitation to party honoring student authors

(Kim, grade 3)

You are invited to our Book Pal Party at 9:30, Wednesday, May 16, 1984 in the Media Center

Please Come!)

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Figure 3

Letter to the principal (Kera, grade 2)

Dear Principel,

I use to live in austan Texas.
I use to go to school at deep wood.
I have lots of friends there.
I lived there until I was Five.
It Is very hot there and very pretty
I had a swimming pool in my back yard.
I always swam in it.
My mom and dad went to work.
My mom worked at H.E.B.
My dad worked at I.B.M.
have a good time in texas.

I am in Mrs. Barbour Class.
I am 8 yers old.

Love Kera,
Just For you.

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Figure 4

Newsletter (Erin, kindergarten:

"One day I saw a red cardinal and I was

climbing up the tree.")

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Figure 5

Newsletter for parents

B.E.A.R.*

*Be Enthusiastic About Reading

Farmington Woods Readers' Digest; Vol. 1, No. 1; February 1984

F.W. GIVES READING INCENTIVES

In cooperation with Sports World, our school will begin a reading incentive program. Each time your child reads a required number of books in his grade level, he will receive a free pass to skate at Sports World. Sports World has donated 4800 free skating passes to our school as the reading incentive. We are appreciative to Sports World for helping us initiate this exciting program designed to develop good reading habits.

Questions about the B.E.A.R. incentive program may be directed to Dr. Moss.

DISCOVER JOY OF READING ALOUD

The Read-Aloud Handbook, by Jim Trelease, is a popular paperback for parents about reading aloud to children. His well-written style describes the how's and why's of reading aloud, how to coax kids away from television, and what to read to children. This important addition to any home library also contains annotations to 300 read-aloud favorites for elementary-age kids.

HERE'S AN IDEA THAT CAN STRENGTHEN YOUR FAMILY

Tonight at the dinner table read something out loud to your family. Tomorrow night, let another member read something.
A news story.
A Robert Frost poem.
A cereal box panel.
History. Humor.
Anything.
Each night a different family member can read a selection.
Imagine the wide range of subjects your family will read in 365 days.
What a stimulating way to have your children develop good reading habits.
It's non-fattening, but enriching.
And it doesn't cost a dime.

QUESTION: If your child comes to a word he doesn't know, what do you say?
ANSWER: Say: What word, which means the same, would fit here? or Skip it, read on, and see if you can figure out what it is.

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Figure 6

Invitation to presentation (grade 1)

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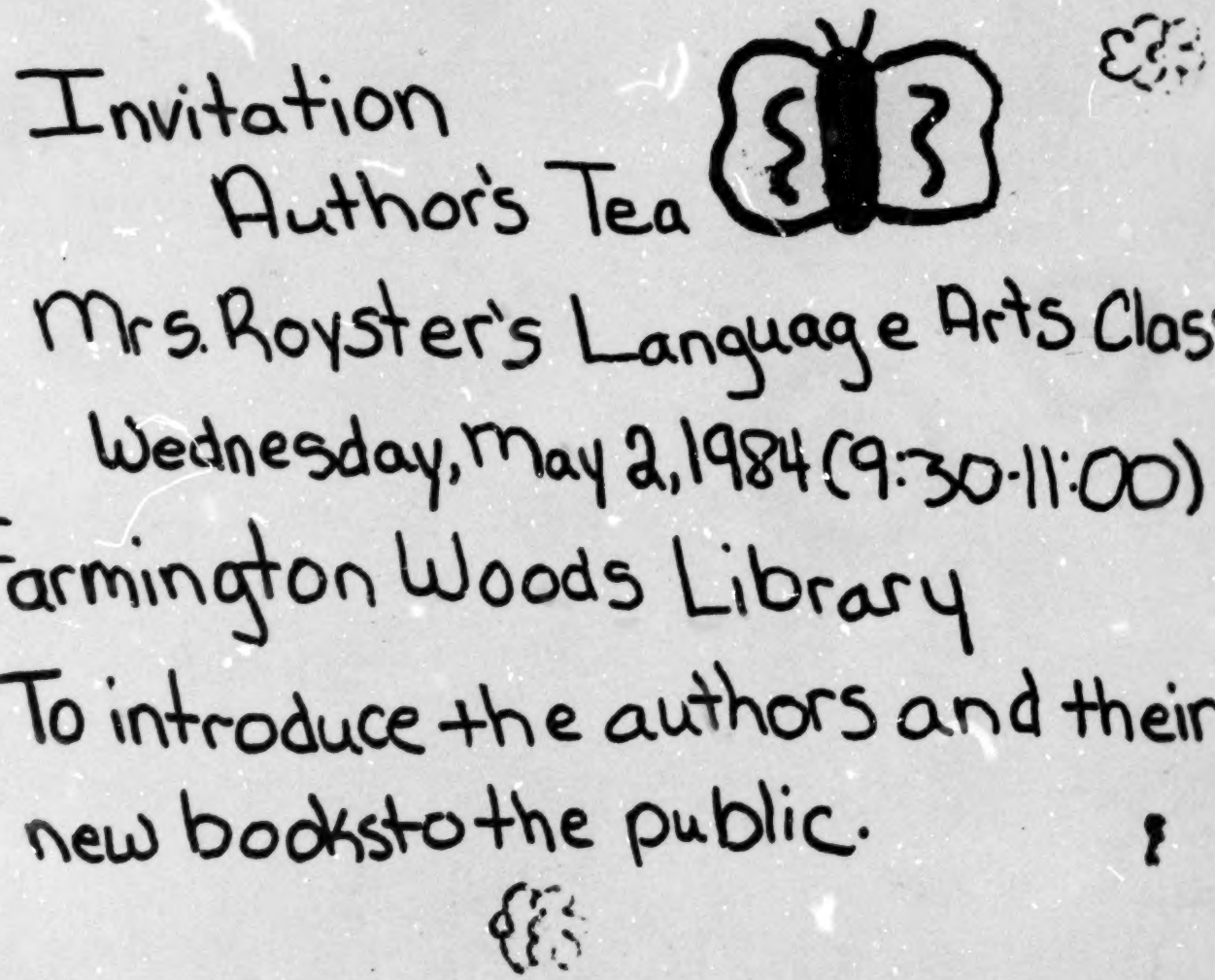
Figure 7

Invitation to authors' tea honoring student authors

(Lindsey, grade 5)



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